

Helen Duran
First Born, First Serve

Animal behavior, especially in swine, is intriguing. Because pigs have multiple offspring from one pregnancy, the dominance and behavior of individual litters is economically important to producers. Many variable factors lead to dominance, so I wanted to measure if a piglet's numerical birth order would affect its dominance (growth, teat attachment). I hypothesized that the first born piglet will possess more dominance because they will get their first choice of teat. This is important as dominant piglets select the teat that provides the most nutrition. I had a unique opportunity to track the birth order and dominance of two individual litters through their farrowing and lactation periods. As each litter was born I tracked individual piglet's birth order and weight. Over the course of 21 days, I observed teat utilization, piglet weight, and average daily gain. I determined each sow's productivity according to a scale. My results show that a larger birth weight can lead to dominance; and that the piglets that were born toward the middle of the farrowing process had a larger birth weight due to more nutrients received in the womb. Overall, the pigs born in the middle had a greater average daily gain over the course of 21 days, and were nursing from the more productive teats. This project helped me realize the importance of keeping records, tracking a sow's productivity, and promoting animal husbandry throughout the farrowing and lactation process, because every pig has value, even though they may not be the most dominant.